

WASHINGTON, D.C. --- Today, 54 members of the House of Representatives sent a letter to the Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the six polar bears trapped in the Suarez Brothers' Circus in Puerto Rico. The letter, initiated by Rep. Earl Blumenauer, asks the Service to deny an export permit to the Circus, which has applied to take the bears to the island of St. Maarten.

"In a civilized society we oppose the mistreatment of animals. When that cruelty takes place in a public forum, we should be outraged. This is the worst example of 'entertainment.' A circus is not an appropriate place for a polar bear, and the Suarez Brothers' Circus is an egregious example of why not," said Blumenauer.

Congressman Blumenauer and other members of the House of Representatives sent the letter in an effort to make sure that the remaining six bears are not removed from U.S. jurisdiction -- and thereby stripped of the protections afforded by U.S. animal welfare laws. This is the minimum required by the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Animal Welfare Act, and the U.S. government's overriding commitment to, and responsibility for, the protection and humane treatment of marine mammals.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service granted an import permit for the Mexico-based Suarez Brothers to bring their circus, with seven polar bears as the main attraction, into Puerto Rico last May. During their stay in Puerto Rico, the bears have been subjected to warm weather as hot as 110 degrees, insufficient access to water, whipping and other abuses. The Fish and Wildlife Service finally took action this March when they confiscated one of the bears, Alaska, upon discovery that the Circus had misrepresented her identity to the Service. Alaska now resides in the Baltimore Zoo.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is currently deciding whether to issue a re-export permit to the Suarez Brothers and allow them to take the polar bears out of the country. The public has until April 26th to comment on the Suarez Brothers' application. The U.S. Marine Mammal Commission and independent zoo experts have raised serious concerns regarding the identity and origin of the Suarez polar bears. Both the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) specifically require the USFWS to withhold import or export permits where wildlife is obtained illegally or where the applicant submits false records.